

PUBLIC HEALTH CAPACITY AND QUALITY

Note to readers and users of the *Healthiest Wisconsin 2020* Profiles: This *Healthiest Wisconsin 2020* Profile is designed to provide background information leading to collective action and results. This profile is a product of the discussions of the Focus Area Strategic Team that was convened by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services during September 2009 through November 2010. The objectives from this Focus Area have been recognized as objectives of *Healthiest Wisconsin 2020*. (Refer to Section 4 of the *Healthiest Wisconsin 2020* plan.) A complete list of *Healthiest Wisconsin 2020* Focus Area Strategic Team Members can be found in Appendix A of the plan.

Definition

Public health capacity and quality means developing and carrying out the core public health legal and professional responsibilities in every community. This includes assuring that the public health core functions and essential services are carried out by the state health department, by local health departments and by other governmental public health partners. An efficient and effective public health system is created by:

- Assuring capacity and quality in health departments and quality in other governmental public health agencies, including public health laboratories.
- Supporting accreditation of state and local health departments.
- Exploring collaboration with others to increase capacity.

Importance of the Focus Area

Public health departments must have the capacity – which includes adequate funding and a sufficient, competent and diverse workforce - to improve and protect the health of the community. Every person in every community should have access to a basic level of public health services from both the state health department and the local health department. In Wisconsin, the minimum level of public health services is defined in state statute and administrative rules, and includes the 10 essential public health services recognized across most states in the United States. Wisconsin Statute 250.03(L) lists 10 essential services to be carried out by the public health system (originally published as part of the *Public Health in America Statement*, 1994). Those who help carry out one or more of the 10 essential public health services are part of Wisconsin's public health system and important partners in *Healthiest Wisconsin 2020*. The essential public health services include:

1. Monitor the health status of populations to identify and solve community health problems.
2. Investigate and diagnose community health problems and health hazards.
3. Inform and educate individuals about health issues.
4. Mobilize public and private sector collaboration and action to identify and solve health problems.
5. Develop policies, plans, and programs that support individual and community health efforts.
6. Enforce statutes and rules that protect health and ensure safety.
7. Link individuals to needed personal health services.
8. Assure a competent public health workforce.
9. Evaluate effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services.
10. Provide research to develop insights into and innovative solutions for health problems.

Although there is an evaluation process in place to review the delivery of local health department services related to state statute, there has been little if any focus on the capacity needed to deliver public health services and the quality of services provided. Likewise, there is no review process in place for the state health department.

Clear expectations and standards for the delivery of public health services are necessary to protect and improve the health of the public. Nonetheless, there exists considerable variability in health department capacity and quality, and in the delivery of these essential public health services in every community served by a health department. Wisconsin is not alone; state and local health departments throughout the nation face similar challenges in protecting the health of the public through delivery of the essential public health services.

In response to these challenges, major national public health organizations, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, and the National Association of County and City Health Officials are moving forward to support voluntary accreditation of state, local, and tribal health departments. The national Public Health Accreditation Board has developed standards and performance measures related to the provision of the essential public health services. Wisconsin also has its own set of standards (state statutes and administrative rules) that define the minimum service delivery requirements for all 92 Wisconsin local health departments. The national and Wisconsin standards will need to be aligned to assure compliance with state laws and administrative rules. Agreed-upon state and national standards will drive health departments to assure the appropriate level of capacity to protect and improve population health.

In addition to assuring the capacity to meet defined standards, health departments must also focus on how effectively and efficiently they are delivering services and attaining desired health outcomes. Health departments are experiencing growing pressure to improve performance and community health outcomes with insufficient resources. In 2009, Wisconsin was listed as lowest of the 50 states for per-capita state funding of public health. Wisconsin's spending on public health is about one-third of the national average (\$35.43 versus \$93.53) (United Health Foundation, *America's Health Rankings*, 2009).

Given this situation, health departments need more resources and at the same time need to become more resourceful in delivering services to achieve better outcomes. Quality improvement is a widely recognized strategy for making transformational changes to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of processes and programs within an agency. To sustain efforts that maximize resources and achieve better health outcomes, health departments must create a “culture of quality” by integrating quality improvement throughout the organization.

Wisconsin Data Highlights

- Wisconsin has 92 local health departments providing services to all communities and Wisconsin’s 5.6 million people.
- Wisconsin has 11 federally recognized American Indian Tribes.
- The Wisconsin Public Health Quality Initiative is working to establish “communities of practice” among state, local, and tribal health departments to support efforts related to quality improvement implementation. Currently, 24 local health departments and the Wisconsin Division of Public Health are part of this initiative (Institute for Wisconsin’s Health, 2010).
- Wisconsin state statute requires that all local health departments be reviewed at least every five years to assure they are providing a minimum level of service to all people and communities in their jurisdiction. In 2006, the Wisconsin Division of Public Health led a process to assess the state public health system’s performance related to the 10 essential public health services using the National Public Health Performance Standards.

Objective 1

By 2020, all Wisconsin health departments will implement established quality improvement processes in daily practice.

Objective 1 Indicator

Proportion of health departments in compliance with the Public Health Accreditation Board Standard 9.2 (periodic survey).

Objective 1 Rationale

Health departments must become more effective and efficient in delivering services to achieve better outcomes. To sustain efforts that maximize resources and attain desired outcomes, health departments must create a “culture of quality” by integrating quality improvement throughout the organization.

Objective 2

By 2020, all Wisconsin health departments will be accredited using an established standard.

Objective 2 Indicators

- Proportion of local health departments and tribal health units that have met either Public Health Accreditation Board or state-adopted accreditation standards.
- Accreditation of the Wisconsin Division of Public Health using either Public Health Accreditation Board or state-adopted accreditation standards.

Objective 2 Rationale

Clear expectations and standards for the delivery of public health services are necessary to protect and improve the health of the public. Agreed-upon state and national standards will drive health departments to assure the appropriate level of capacity to protect and improve population health.

Potential evidence- or science-based actions to move the focus area objectives forward over the decade

- Hold training for the state and local health departments on public health quality improvement processes.
- Develop quality improvement resources for the state and local health departments that specifically connect to strategic planning efforts.
- Connect the state and local health department review process results to quality improvement recommendations.
- Hold training for the state and local health departments on national accreditation standards.
- Develop and implement a strategic plan to move the current process to review local health departments into alignment with national accreditation standards.
- Adopt formal standards of review for the state and local health departments that align with national accreditation standards.

References

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